

SUPREME COURT
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS
THE RHODE ISLAND JUDICIARY'S RESPONSE TO CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19)

Question: Are the courthouses closed in Rhode Island?

Answer: In short, the answer is no. The continued changes to the Supreme Court Clerk's operations can be found in Executive Order 2020-10. All other courts have identified emergency/essential matters as set forth in Executive Order 2020-09 which shall be heard in the appropriate court or remotely (by telephone, videoconference or other similar means, where available and publicly accessible). As to non-emergency/non-essential matters, there shall be no in-person hearings. A court may conduct hearings remotely on qualifying non-emergency/non-essential matters. Eviction filings shall not be submitted to or heard by the District Court until after May 17, 2020.

The Judicial Records Center and Fogarty Judicial Annex were closed to the public on March 17, 2020. To conserve resources and critical supplies needed to fight the COVID-19 virus, McGrath (Washington County) and Murray (Newport County) Judicial Complexes were closed on April 1, 2020. On April 6, 2020, Noel Judicial Complex (Kent County) and the Traffic Tribunal were closed as individuals who entered or were assigned to those buildings tested positive for COVID-19. The Noel Judicial Complex (Kent County) and the Traffic Tribunal re-opened on April 13, 2020. Please see the "Contact Information" on this page to contact the respective courts if needed.

Question: How is the Rhode Island Judiciary implementing social distancing in the courthouses?

Answer:

1. Everyone entering a judicial building shall be subject to verbal screening for COVID-19 exposure or symptomology.
2. Only those judicial officers, essential personnel, litigants, witnesses, and other necessary parties who pass verbal screening shall be allowed to enter the judicial buildings.
3. Members of the press who wish to access a judicial building shall be permitted to do so with the approval of the presiding judicial officer and by coordinating with the Director of the Judiciary's Office of Community Outreach and Public Relations by contacting cberke@courts.ri.gov. Members of the press shall be subject to the screening protocols in place at each judicial building prior to entry and access may be limited when necessary to prevent crowding. If physical entry

to a judicial building is denied to a member of the press, alternative means of access shall be made available.

4. All proceedings taking place within a judicial building shall be conducted in a manner which adheres to the directives issued by the Governor and the Department of Health with respect to social distancing and crowd restrictions to the greatest extent possible.

Question: How does the public access the court hearings?

Answer: The public health crisis necessitates that all judicial buildings be closed to the public to the greatest extent possible. Public access to all court proceedings normally open to the public shall be available by telephonic or other means. Information regarding public access is available on the Judiciary's website or by contacting the appropriate clerk's office for further information.

Question: How can I meet payment dates or court-imposed deadlines if cases are continued?

Answer: All payment dates are continued until further notice. All filing deadlines which would have expired between March 17, 2020 and May 17, 2020 shall be extended to May 29, 2020. Where available, parties and their attorneys should continue to utilize the electronic filing system for appropriate and timely filings. Pro se litigants may utilize the electronic filing system or submit filings by mail or other means, as allowed pursuant to administrative orders promulgated by each of the respective courts.

Question: What if my pleading requires a notarized signature or my hearing requires an in-person oath or affirmation?

Answer: Any rule that may be interpreted to require administering any oath or affirmation in-person may be relaxed to allow such oaths or affirmations to be administered remotely by available technologies, including videoconferencing or teleconferencing, provided such remote administration is not otherwise prohibited by any statutory or constitutional provision. Notarial acts shall be governed by the Remote Online Notarization guidelines promulgated by the Secretary of State and available at www.sos.ri.gov.